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Special attention was given to slow learners with unstable and culturally deprived backgrounds to keep them interested and in school. Participants were 14 years old, with an I.Q. of 76-90 and two years retardation in language, reading, and mathematics. Project teachers were specially selected for their understanding and ability to teach emotionally unstable, slow learners. The teachers took part in a 40 hour training workshop prior to teaching duty. In addition there were seven in-service training meetings during the year. Teachers have found the following techniques effective: allowing students freedom from pressure, daring to be creative and imaginative, maintaining a sense of humor, and stimulating through encouragement and sincere praise.

Teaching materials are used to motivate students and teach them the basic skills they need. Machines and programed materials are used for motivational purposes. Reading materials are chosen for easy reading and high-interest levels. Audio-visual aids, newspapers and field trips are used to teach practical skills that students recognize as useful.

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REPORT ON TALENT PRESERVATION
of the
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS
of
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Authorized by the Board of Education on June 12, 1961

BOARD MEMBERS

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The Talent Preservation Project in Houston is opening doors of opportunity to junior high school students who have been plagued by the following problems:

Lack of stability in the homes caused by divorce, desertion, poverty, illness or mobility
Lack of cultural stimulation in the home attributed to apathy, indolence, illiteracy, disproportionate family size, or language barriers
Lack of enrichment experiences in both the home and school to ensure the disadvantaged student an equal or comparable readiness so vital to the successful learning experiences
Lack of flexible, realistic curriculum for the disadvantaged child

In the spring of 1960, the number of voluntary and involuntary dropouts in the Houston Independent School District totaled 4,964. As the peak membership for the district was 177,230 students during that period, when considered on a percentage basis the figure appears somewhat negligible; however, to the students and to society the loss was a grevious one. In an effort to intensify the holding power of the school for those students manifesting a complex of problems interpreted to be characteristic of the potential dropout, on June 12, 1961 the Board of Education authorized a four-year experimental program to be instituted at the seventh grade level in September, 1961. Individual school participation in the project was voluntary, and fifteen junior high schools were involved during the first semester of the 1961-1962 school year. At the conclusion of the 1962-1963 school year, 23 junior high schools were participating in the project and 1400 students were enrolled in the 70 classes.

To avoid the inherent stigma of being described as the class for slow learners, the program was entitled Talent Preservation Project. The philosophy affirms that it is the obligation of the school to assist the student in the discovery and development of his capabilities, however limited. It is further believed that many of the young people who have become discouraged by repeated experiences of failure and frustration do possess the latent potential to become productive, valuable adults if they can be placed in an environment in which success is attainable.

Eligibility of project students was determined according to the following criteria:
Chronological age of 14 years
Intelligence Quotient of 76-90
Academic retardation of two years or more in language, reading and mathematics
Cumulative record of academic, emotional and social maladjustment
Record of irregular attendance during elementary school

Project teachers were selected by each principal on the basis of ability, understanding and desire to help students of low academic achievement and a record of experience in working patiently and inspiringly with such students. Prior to the beginning of the first semester, the project teachers attended a forty-hour workshop for which the Board of Education authorized the payment of a $100 stipend per teacher. The crucial problem at that initial point was adequate orientation of teachers with little or no special training for working with slow learners in order to ensure the establishment of the essential rapport with the bored, defiant, confused, and belligerent students who had experienced so much failure. The challenge was one of inspiring teachers to understand the special factors in the students' backgrounds, to accord deference to those differences, and to develop curricula and teaching techniques to reflect *realism* as well as *idealism.*

During the school year, in-service training meetings were scheduled for the fifth Tuesday of each six weeks period and time devoted to:

1. Interpretation of the objectives of the project and ways to implement them.
2. Discussion of the characteristics of the potential dropout student.
3. Development of a better understanding of the students and their problems.
4. Exploration of the principles for establishing the desired teacher-student rapport.
5. Demonstration of the use of effective instructional materials and techniques.
6. Production of specific daily plans for academic instruction.
7. Formulation of general plans for cultural enrichment to compensate for cultural deprivation.

One of the dividends of the in-service training has been the development of intense project pride and enthusiasm. The recurring comment of the many visitors from other school districts has concerned the apparent determination of the project teachers to succeed. From the very beginning there has been a very strong common bond among the teachers. One administrator commented after attending an in-service training session, "It is gratifying to witness the mutual respect and professional spirit which exists within the group." The frequently expressed interest of the school board and administrative staff and the favorable support of the local newspapers have been of inestimable value in the development of project pride. Most of the teachers regard the assignment as an honor as well as a challenge.

The readjustment of project teachers who have had little special training for working with academically retarded or slow-learning students has been one of the project's greatest achievements. It is remarkable how they have come to love their students and have sought through infinite patience, sincere sympathy, and warm understanding to salvage and rehabilitate them.

The following principles have been most satisfactory in establishing the desired wholesome teacher-pupil rapport:

1. Dare to be creative and imaginative.
2. Allow students freedom from pressures whatever the source.
3. Appear relaxed and informal.
4. Be firm but understanding.
5. Maintain a sense of humor in the most trying and humorless situations.
6. Approach all problems honestly, in absolute control of the emotions.
7. Prepart to work consistently with individuals in a group situation and accept varied responses on a wide range of grade levels.
8. Seek insight to the pupil's problems and interests.
9. Continue to work with enthusiasm for prolonged periods without the encouragement generated by discernible student progress.
10. Demonstrate a sincere concern for the student's welfare.
11. Stimulate through encouragement and sincere praise.

The objectives defined at the beginning of the project and which currently apply are:

1. To intensify the holding power of the school through dynamic motivation and through expert guidance.
2. To develop and strengthen basic communication skills and fundamentals of mathematics.
3. To provide learning experiences to combat the influence of competitive "pull-away from school" attractions.
4. To cultivate a more positive attitude on the part of the student toward his limitations.
5. To attempt to improve the student's damaged self-image and elevate his aspirations.
6. To prepare those students who do leave school when they are no longer subject to compulsory school attendance laws to become a constructive force in American society.
7. To develop worthwhile leisure-time preferences.

The achievement of the objectives enumerated above continues to be pursued according to the following plan:

Class size does not exceed twenty students. Lessons are simple, very thoroughly planned and presented in small, digestible bits. Two of the six periods of the school day are devoted to language arts with the emphasis on corrective reading. The third period the students are enrolled in a modified mathematics course. During the remaining three periods, the students are scheduled for physical education two elective courses, in which classes the students are channeled back into the main stream of school life. Electives offered are crafts, shop, cosmetology, art, music, band, orchestra, typing, homemaking, and public speaking.

Teachers strive to ensure that students are fully aware of the practicality, utility, and value of all assignments. Each learning experience is evaluated in view of its apparent relation to the needs and characteristics of the students.

Very forceful effort is expended to develop and strengthen the basic reading and study skills so vital for academic improvement. Machines and programmed materials are used for motivational purposes. As all students are two or more years retarded in reading skills, and since to these students books are symbolic of failure, care has been exercised to ensure successful initial reading experiences. The materials which are provided are unlike those with which difficulties were previously experienced. A partial list of the materials of easy-reading, high-interest levels available are:

Science Research Associates Intermediate Reading Laboratories and *Better Reading* Books
Teen-Age Tales, published by D.C. Heath and Company
McCall-Crabbs *Standard Test Lessons in Reading*
Reading for Meaning, published by J.B. Lippincott Company
Webster Publishing Company's *Everyreader Series* and *Practice Readers,* Books 1 and 2
The Steck Company's Adventure and Sports Books
The Turner-Livingston Reading Series, published by McCormick-Mathers Publishing Company, Inc.
My Weekly Reader, various levels, published by Wesleyan University Press, Inc.
Reader's Digest *Reading Skills Builders,* various levels
Dolch Teaching Aids, published by Garrard Publishing Company
Harr Wagner Publishing Company's Deep Sea Adventure and Morgan Bay Mystery Books
Educational Development Laboratories Controlled Reader, Elementary Filmstrips and *Listen and Read* Tapes
Lyons and Carnahan *Developmental Reading Series,* Classmate Editions, various levels
Telephone Directories, both white and yellow pages
Time Tables of public transportation agencies
Maps, local, state and national

A well-balanced reading skills program is conducted. No one method or material is relied upon entirely, rather a combination of methods and materials is used. Periodic trips to the library are scheduled and the cooperation of the librarian in locating appropriate books is solicited. An awards system suggested by the Texas

Education Agency is followed and is found to be quite effective. The Texas Readers Certificates are very prominently displayed on the bulletin boards. Since many of these youngsters were deprived the pleasure of listening to parents and other adults read stories during their childhood, teachers read regularly to their students. Such books as Lippincott's *Sports Illustrated* Library, *My Friend Flicka, Swiftwater, Reach for the Sky, Kon Tiki, Call of the Wild,* and others have brought hours of delight to youngsters who once could not possibly conceive that between the covers of books there is magic. Students are allowed time for buzz sessions to talk about books.

Recordings of poetry, short stories, dramatizations, and choral reading are used to develop appreciational and better listening skills. The *Listen and Read* Tapes recently released by Educational Developmental Laboratories are quite effective.

Each morning the daily newspaper is delivered to the project classes. A regular time is designated for skimming the front page and discussing the news of national and international importance. Word attack study is regarded as more meaningful and practical when one is learning how to unlock and pronounce the names of places and people of importance. Even a limited knowledge of current events "lifts the lid" for these students.

The weather report is a "must" and it is great sport to evaluate its accuracy at the close of each day. Cartoons, pictures, fillers, jokes, human interest stories tempt the reluctant reader to test his reading power. All enjoy the sports page. Students are allowed to read the comics, and are advised that such reading is for recreational purposes. That reading can be recreation is quite a revelation to these students. In many of their homes there are no books, magazines or newspapers. The feature articles of the society section provide motivation and reference material for the daily stress on good grooming and etiquette. Teachers have also used the catalogues of various mail order houses very advantageously in units devoted to cleanliness and proper dress.

The classified ads are used to reinforce the "stay-in-school" campaign. The absence of employment opportunities for youth of limited training is regularly invited to their attention.

The instructional program in the English class is built around situations in which students practice language activities rather than learn a body of rules and principles. The communication-centered English program requires less exercise-doing and more actual expression of ideas in oral and written form. Sentence sense is developed through the creation of the student's original sentence rather than by punctuating and labeling the sentence parts of sentences from a text. *Phrases for Compositions,* Book I and *Familiar Situations,* Books II and III, published by Educators Publishing Service have been found to be most effective in training students to use their five senses as a foundation for the thought underlying all compositions. These exercise books permit less copying of ideas and require more individual effort in summoning original ideas.

There is little possibility that the disadvantaged youth who becomes a dropout will ever be requested to write a research paper or an essay, but there is strong likelihood that he will face rigorous demands for social and business letter writing. Certainly throughout his life he will be required to complete many various types of forms. Should the student become sufficiently strengthened through the modified English and reading program for a successful school career, the essay and research paper will come later. With the sentence sense he has developed, he will be decidedly better qualified for the assignment. However, should he withdraw from the classroom to enter the world of work, it is necessary that he be prepared to cope with the many forms and blanks which otherwise will appear to be an enigma. Rigorous training is given in social and business letter writing. Students are given instruction in completing bank deposits, checks, receipts, contest forms, subscription and mail order blanks, and applications for driver's license, employment and library cards, health certificates, and social security cards.

When using the tele-trainer for improving telephone techniques, a second medium, the tape recorder, is brought into the classroom. The trainer is used to demonstrate how to make an appointment, to place an order at a department store, to report an emergency to proper city authorities. The recorder collects the material for many future meaningful lessons in usage. Learning to give succinct directions, to request and offer explanations, to make introductions, to extend congratulations and apologies, to converse intelligently and correctly are experiences which the disadvantaged child can recognize as having greater practical value to him than rhetorical principles.

Vocabulary development, diction and oral reading skills acquire new importance when the door to the public address system is opened to students through participation in the morning devotional exercise. Panel discussions, announcements, dramatizations, choral reading, poetry interpretation are accomplished with enthusiasm when participants are allowed to broadcast from the sound room to the English class.

During the orientation period the mathematics class students are asked, "Do you like math, or just endure it?" Students write their answers to the question and submit their responses unsigned. Such a technique has revealed a total lack of understanding of the importance of mathematics, lack of knowledge of the most fundamental processes, and a lack of comprehension of the language of mathematics. Early instruction is devoted to a discussion explaining where and why arithmetic is used, and prepares the students for a unit on the history of mathematics. Students are intrigued to learn why arithmetic developed in its present form, and become interested to know where it is going in the future.

Mathematics becomes a fascinating study when it is correlated with practical everyday experiences. A student's discovery of the specific need for mathematical concepts in elective courses is the most forceful motivation for instruction in whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percentages. When a skill in accurate measurement is the

prerequisite to the completion of a shop project, boys persevere with unusual interest. Girls have come to realize the necessity for adapting recipes by increasing or decreasing the amount of ingredients in homemaking class. This makes the study of fractions decidedly more meaningful and reinforces the mathematics teacher's efforts to impress students with the importance of a knowledge of weights and measurement.

In order that students may have access to concrete objects so necessary for complete understanding, many teaching aids have been made available. A few of these are thermometers, scales, clock dials, flash cards, numbers games and toy money. A special text, *Seeing Through Arithmetic,* Book B, published by Scott, Foresman and Company, has been furnished to each project class.

Students and teachers also draft many of the arithmetic problems from the commercial advertisements in the newspapers, comparing the various prices of articles of clothing, automobiles, groceries, and other consumer products.

In the physical education and elective classes the project students are associated with the rest of the school population where their academic retardation is of slight significance and they enjoy successful competition with the regular seventh grade students. As previously mentioned, indeed the elective courses have served a dual purpose by providing the incentive for exerting greater diligence in math and language classes. In attempting to follow directions in homemaking and shop courses, girls and boys have come to realize the necessity for improved reading and mathematical skills. To illustrate, reference is made to the case of Felix, a fifteen year old Mexican boy who left school, but returned because of the encouragement given him by interested neighbors who read of the project. Felix's good work practices resulted in his being appointed foreman of the woodshop. With this distinction came increased responsibilities. As Felix could neither alphabetize the class roll, nor spell the names of his fellow students, purposeful lessons in spelling and arranging words in alphabetical sequence suddenly became very important.

Motivational approaches which have been most successful are the carefully planned excursions which students have taken to points of local interest. A boat trip down the Houston Ship Channel to the San Jacinto Battlegrounds, the cradle of Texas independence, was scheduled for each of the original thirty classes. The captain of the vessel lectured to the students about the history and construction of the channel, the foreign ships in the port, the grain elevators and methods for loading ships, and the various industrial plants along the channel. Many of the students had never been to the battleground, although it is a well-known historical attraction. Teachers report that after this experience, the daily shipping reports became another avidly read section of the newspaper. Students also requested a unit of study about state history.

On November 12, 1962 the Board of Education allocated $1,000 for payment of bus transportation for local field trips. Classes visited banks and returned to class interested in learning to make change accurately and in discussing simplified financial questions. Visits to dairies, milk plants, bakeries and supermarkets motivated units of study on diet and nutrition. Public utility plants, newspaper plants, military bases, parks, public libraries, municipal airport, the zoo, museums, radio and television studios were included on the itinerary. The Youth Symphony and a ballet performance sponsored by the Houston Independent School District were also attended by the project classes.

Voting machines were examined at the time they were housed in the school buildings for elections. A discussion of the responsibilities of the informed voter followed. A question-answer session about government was initiated.

Not only did the classes visit, but they received visitors as well. Community agencies and private citizens were made aware of the project and its objectives and invited to visit the schools.

The United States Army Recruiting Office scheduled army counsellors to visit each project class and present the Army's "Stay in School" program. Counsellors from the Texas Employment Agency visited classes and discussed the importance of education and the critical lack of employment opportunities for the non-skilled worker. Representatives from the Houston Police Department and the Texas Department of Public Safety visited some of the classes and discussed the necessity for law enforcement and safety measures. Dentists, nurses, librarians, counsellors and representatives from business and industry have visited the classes and discussed their particular fields of endeavor.

Drama and modern dance departments from senior high schools have brought live drama and the dance to some of the classes. Teachers provided opportunities for students to develop social graces by occasionally arranging for class parties, receptions, and informal luncheons within the classroom. The class discussions which precede these social occasions focus attention on appropriate clothing and courteous conduct.

Project teachers are scheduled for two fifty-five minute conference periods a day. The additional conference period affords time for visiting homes, counseling with parents, and interpreting the program to other members of the faculty and to the community. Parents of the students are urged to become involved in the activities of the school; to visit the classrooms; to confer with the principal, the teachers and other personnel; to participate in parent organizations of the school; and to concern themselves with appropriate school-centered activities. To assure articulation within each building, a committee comprised of all teachers who have any contact with project students is organized. Committee meetings are scheduled regularly for the purpose of exploring mutual problems, exchanging suggestions concerning effective practices, and the reporting of progress.

In order that these students may come to respect themselves as individuals who are a necessary and valuable part of the school population, participation in some phase of the extra-curricular program of the school is strongly encouraged. To accelerate their rehabilitation a very carefully planned guidance program is designed to improve their attitudes toward themselves, their peers and their world.

Attitudes, aspirations and emotional environment cannot be measured objectively. The opinions of school personnel and the students themselves are the best instruments. Principals, assistant principals, counsellors and teachers have been quite successful in inculcating a sense of group and individual pride. Students frequently comment, "For the first time in my life I enjoy school." Assistant principals report very few discipline problems with the project students. Principals have commented there seems to be some spillover into regular classes. The attractive bulletin boards, hobby centers, book displays, current events corners, and effective and creative instructional practices of the Talent Preservation Project teachers inspire those who work with the average student to be more creative. One principal reported, "Talent Preservation is the most needed and beneficial program that has ever been offered in my building."

On the eve of the third year the following scope and sequence is envisioned as a feasible system of progression. (It will be noted that rather than referring to the students by the traditional grade level terms, years are designated as levels of achievement.)

Level I[1]

Two periods of Language Arts
Mathematics
Junior Citizenship Education
Health and Physical Education
Art or Music

Level I[2]

Two periods of Language Arts
Mathematics
Junior Citizenship Education
Health and Physical Education
Music or Art

Level II[1]

Two periods of Language Arts
Mathematics
Texas Geography
Health and Physical Education
*Elective

Level II[2]

Two periods of Language Arts
Mathematics
Texas History and Government
Health and Physical Education
*Elective

**Depending on facilities of school*

Level III[1]

Language Arts
Modified Life Science
Mathematics
Health and Physical Education
Elective
Elective or *Work Assignment

Level III[2]

Language Arts
Modified Earth Science
Mathematics
Health and Physical Education
Elective
*Work Assignment or Elective

*The Work Assignment will provide an opportunity for the student to work one period per day under supervision in library, office, bookroom, etc. developing responsibility, good habits and attitudes for and toward work.

On June 7, 1963 the Board of Education authorized a plan whereby Level IV students are to be housed in senior high school buildings for the final year of the four year project. There they will be associated with older students and a more extensive elective program will be available.

Level IV[1]

Practical English
Practical Mathematics
Modified American History
Health and Physical Education
Elective) Tailored to student
Elective)

Level IV[2]

Practical English
Practical Mathematics
Modified American History
Health and Physical Education
Elective
Elective or job training and placement

The percentage of project students who left school during the first year, either voluntarily or involuntarily, was 1.9 per cent. Of the 555 students enrolled in project classes at the conclusion of the 1961-1962 school year, 96.7 per cent returned to school in September 1962; of this number 20 have passed the compulsory school age of 16. There have been 95 students from the project returned to either regular classes or placed in special education classes.

During the fall semester of 1961, 10 per cent of the 325 junior high students received perfect attendance awards, and in the spring semester of 1962, 15 per cent of the 555 project students received similar awards. At the end of the 1962-1963 school year, 1363 of the project students had qualified for perfect attendance certificates which are presented at the end of each six-weeks period. Ribbons were awarded to 176 students who had perfect attendance during the Fall or Spring semesters and 55 students received special awards for perfect attendance during the entire school year. Four project students also qualified for awards for perfect attendance since the beginning of the project classes in 1961.

No statement more aptly summarizes the impact of the project on the lives of these young people than the comment of one of the students after his first exposure to live theater. When one of the local theaters offered a block of matinee tickets to their production "Life with Father," the teachers were delighted, but not so the students. What to them was theater? They much preferred a Saturday afternoon filled with the gunsmoke of Western reruns or the blatant beat of the jukebox; however, the persuasive powers of project teachers are not to be underestimated. At the final curtain call, seventeen year old John, who had resisted the idea so vehemently, startled his teacher with, "Why this is great, just great. It's better than television. Why it's even better than the movies! You know something? When Father looked out that window and saw Cousin Cora, I could see all the way down that street!" Thus in his newly acquired enthusiasm for dramatic art, John synthesized the objectives outlined in the preceding pages—a new perception of opportunity and a purposeful sense of direction. Indeed many of the project students are discovering that the road of life need not be a dismal, one-way, dead-end street, but that . . .

"The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide.
Above the world is stretched the sky
No higher than the soul is high."

—*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Mrs. Jozie M. Mock,
Supervisor of Talent Preservation Project.